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Webster Is Confirmed by Senate As Head of Central Intelligence

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WASHINGTON, May 19 — William H. Webster, who won bipartisan acclaim for his nine-year leadership of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was confirmed by the Senate tonight as Director of Central Intelligence.

The vote was 94 to 1.

The 63-year-old former Federal judge will take charge of the Central Intelligence Agency at a particularly difficult moment in its history. The C.I.A. is under intense scrutiny by Congress for its role in the Iran-contra affair.

Assailed on Notice Requirements

Many members of Congress have criticized Mr. Webster's predecessor, William J. Casey, for evading legal requirements of notice to Congress for covert operations and for not being forthcoming in testimony before the Senate and House intelligence committees last winter. Mr. Casey resigned in February after surgery for brain cancer and died this month.

President Reagan nominated Mr. Webster on March 3, after his initial choice, Robert M. Gates, withdrew his name.

Mr. Gates, a career C.I.A. official who has been the agency's Acting Director and is expected to remain as Deputy Director, was criticized by some senators in his confirmation hearings for having permitted the C.I.A. to become involved in the sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of the profits to the Nicaraguan rebels.

Mr. Gates denied the charges but withdrew his name as his confirmation prospects grew dim.

Mr. Webster, by contrast, won unanimous approval on May 1 from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Commitment to Oversight

The chairman of that committee, Senator David L. Boren, Democrat of Oklahoma, said on the Senate floor today that Mr. Webster was "fully qualified in all respects to provide the leadership needed by the intelligence community at this critical time."

He said Mr. Webster had persuaded the committee of his commitment to Congressional oversight. "Oversight is legitimate in his eyes," Senator Boren said. "We will attempt a full and candid relationship that will benefit the country."

Senator William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, who serves as vice chairman of the intelligence committee, told the Senate, "We are satisfied that he understands his role as Director of the agency and the role of the agency in our system."

The vote today was made possible after Senator John Melcher, Democrat of Montana, removed a "hold" that he had placed on the nomination. Senate procedures permit a senator to delay a confirmation. Senator Melcher said he

objected to Mr. Webster because he viewed the F.B.I.'s record of solving crimes on Indian reservations as "totally unsatisfactory."

Senator Melcher told the Senate that he was satisfied by a letter he received from Mr. Webster today pledging enhanced F.B.I. efforts to improve law enforcement on the reservations.

"I'm pleased he has set the course of the F.B.I. over the next several years in looking into these problems in depth," Senator Melcher said.

'Run Amok in Nevada'

The one negative vote was cast by Senator Harry Reid, Democrat of Nevada. He said that while Mr. Webster was "an honorable and decent man," he had permitted the F.B.I. to "run amok in Nevada." Senator Reid said F.B.I. agents investigating crime in the state had "harassed decent, law-abiding citizens." The agency has investigated a number of prominent officials in the state.

The only other criticism on the Senate floor came from Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania. He voted for confirmation but said he was disturbed by evidence that the F.B.I. "may have winked at possible violations of law" involving the activities of Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North in directing efforts to aid the Nicaraguan rebels.

After an initial two-day confirmation hearing, the intelligence committee summoned Mr. Webster back for a third day on April 30 to discuss contacts that Colonel North had with F.B.I. officials while he was on the staff of the National Security Council in 1985 and 1986.

7-Year Term Proposed

Mr. Webster was nearing the end of a 10-year term as Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Director of Central Intelligence serves at the pleasure of the President. Senator Robert C. Byrd, the majority leader, said tonight that he was introducing a bill to set seven-year terms for the Director and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

A fixed term, the West Virginia Democrat said, would "make it possible for the agency to resist pressure to engage in questionable or illegal activities." Similar bills have failed in the past.

Five Senators did not vote: Bob Dole, Republican of Kansas, the minority leader; William V. Roth Jr., Republican of Delaware; Steve Simms, Republican of Idaho; Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut, and Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois.

2/20